



FDDC Communications Office

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Advocates Launch “Inclusion NOW!” Movement

TALLAHASSEE — Developmental disabilities advocates and experts have begun speaking out in a unified voice about the need for inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society. Led by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC), this aggressive push for inclusion is the outcome of a summer 2007 summit and is being guided by a Strategic Action Plan that resulted from the summit.

The plan is the culmination of meetings and workshops conducted by experts in the fields of education, health care, community living and employment; an extensive review of Florida’s inclusion practices; and well documented evidence-based best inclusion practices.

“The Strategic Action Plan gives us the blueprint we need to ensure the full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in our schools, businesses and communities,” said Debra Dowds, executive director of the FDDC. “The plan identifies extensive system-change and calls upon elected officials, state agency leaders and service providers to join in an inclusion movement so Florida can achieve the goal of full inclusion.”

The two-day “Inclusion NOW!” Summit, held in Orlando in June 2007, provided advocates and experts a forum for discussing their vision for inclusion in education, health care, community living and employment, and for developing strategies for making inclusion a reality. Additionally, attendees examined the resources and mechanisms available to support systems change.

FDDC will utilize the Strategic Action Plan as a guide to raise awareness of the needs for inclusion and to seek the changes needed to make inclusion the rule, not the exception.

Individuals with disabilities are the largest minority in the U.S., comprising almost 20 percent of the population. Twenty-nine percent of American families include a member with disabilities.

“Excluding or separating individuals with disabilities does not serve the public interest nor does it serve the person’s best interest,” said Nila Benito, chairperson for the “Inclusion NOW!” Summit and Community Supports Coordinator of the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities, which is based at the University of South Florida. “Barriers which prevent or impair the realization of full inclusion for all individuals must be identified, addressed and overcome.”

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The goals of inclusion are to ensure the following:

- All individuals have the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- All students have maximum access to the general education expectations, curriculum and instruction within the regular school settings and programs.
- All individuals have access within their community to quality medical, dental and vision health care throughout their lives.
- All individuals have the opportunity to contribute to the economic viability of their community as workers and consumers of services and goods.
- All individuals have access to safe and affordable housing that includes both home ownership and rental opportunities.
- All individuals are welcome to enjoy, participate and contribute to the full range of social, cultural and recreational resources and activities within their community.

“Inclusion NOW!” is a public-education campaign stressing the importance of full inclusion for people with disabilities in education, business and the community. It asserts that *now* is the time to enact and enforce legislation and assure that people with disabilities have the freedom, responsibility and right to experience life as equal and active members of society.

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To request a copy of the Strategic Action Plan or for more information about the “Inclusion NOW!” campaign, contact the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., at (800) 580-7801.